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I am writing to give my testimony regarding Raised Bill # 317, An Act concerning Dyslexia.

I am a former practicing dentist and mother of a student with dyslexia. I changed careers and became an elementary educator, receiving a masters degree in education and CT teaching certification. Entering the classroom as a grade one teacher, I had no idea how to teach reading, despite the fact that teaching first graders to read and write was one of the, if not the most important professional responsibility of my position.

I personally assumed responsibility for learning how to teach reading, at great personal cost both with regard to time and finances. After several years as a classroom teacher, I went to UConn to pursue my Ph.D. in Special Education with a focus on Literacy, Learning Disabilities, and Teacher Knowledge of Reading Instruction. Upon completing my doctorate, I became a full-time tenure track professor at Eastern Connecticut State University where I taught graduate reading and assessment courses and was charged by the Dean to write, with my then colleague, Dr. Brandon Monroe, the graduate reading program for experienced teachers who were studying for their certification(s) in reading. We developed both the Remedial Reading – 102 certification and the Reading Consultant – 097 certification programs. Teachers with five and more years of experience came to ECSU for this program. Most were working in Connecticut schools as elementary classroom teachers and by observation and their admission, they knew little about teaching reading.

Truth be told, there was much controversy among faculty members about how reading is taught and how children learn. When the CT State Department of Education began requiring elementary candidates to pass the CT Foundations of Reading Test, ECSU's pass rate was dismal. We had three professors teaching the required reading class. I can proudly say that 100% of my student consistently passed the test on their first try, yet ECSU's pass rate was between 50 and 60%.

Across the state, scores were embarrassing. The Dean at Western Connecticut State University hired me to come to WCSU to teach a course on teaching reading to the WCSU faculty and also the students from WCSU who had failed (some multiple times) the CFRT.

I left higher education after four years and returned to K-12, first as a literacy coach and subsequently as an administrator. I have worked in three districts in CT as an administrator and what I see consistently is teachers who are missing key tools in their teaching toolboxes to support students' literacy learning. All certified reading teachers, those who teach kids who don't "get it" in their regular instruction, and those who coach teachers and provided professional development, are not "created equal" with regard to their knowledge base. In the past two years, I have encountered far too numerous reading teachers who did not know what the six syllable types of the English Language are. They did not know the science of reading instruction – including what phonemic awareness is – in a deeply informed manner. Their assessment literacy is inadequate. The unfortunate reality is that these folks are certified as 102 and/or 097 level professionals in our state. These individuals paid tuition and accumulated sufficient credits to be recommended by their institutions for certification. They want to do a good job. Without the knowledge and the tools, they cannot support our most at-risk students or their colleagues – no matter how much they want to do just that. Our current manner of preparing reading teachers, in general, is not consistent and not sufficient.

As Assistant Superintendent, I have a responsibility to hire educators who have the appropriate certifications for the positions as legislated and codified in our certification regulations. Unfortunately, without comprehensive preparation of educators at the Institutions of Higher Education – in alignment with evidence-based literacy standards, hiring people who can support at-risk students and coach colleagues, the system is crippled. One course on "dyslexia" is not feasible. As one who has designed a comprehension program for two advanced certifications, I can say with authority and experience that advanced reading programs must prepare candidates comprehensively to understand the science of reading and how the brain learns to read and then build upon the basic foundations to prepare candidates to assess and diagnose students and design evidence-based instructional programs individualized to their literacy profile as revealed through analysis of relevant data. Candidates must deeply understand

and have clinical opportunities to implement designed plans and progress monitor student growth, learning how to accelerate growth to close students' gaps in learning through structured, systematic, targeted, individualized interventions. Additionally, reading teachers must have command (1) of language development, (2) the state standards for literacy in all content areas, (3) strategies for collaborating with other professionals on the teaching team, and (4) the willingness and skill-set to interact with, communicate with, and support parents. CT would do well to review the requirements of other proactive states and consider the number of credits and practicum hours for reading specialist training. Most programs have 36 or more credits and 100 or more practicum hours.

School districts should not be expected to retrain reading specialists once they are hired. While professional learning is critical to capacity building of all professional staff, professional *training* to become certification eligible is the responsibility of the institution of higher education that recommends the candidate to the state certification office. Colleges and Universities should hold themselves to high standards with regard not only to the quality of their certification programs as this Bill addresses, they should also ensure that those entrusted with delivering the program are both highly qualified and experienced. The importance of this bill cannot be over-emphasized. It is not hyperbole to say that the lives of students with dyslexia and reading disabilities depend on a highly trained, highly competent team of professionals in each of Connecticut's schools. Without reading teachers who have the knowledge and skill-set to teach reading and build capacity of others, the team is unlikely to be able to support our most at-risk students.

When I began this, I told you that I was a mother of a student with dyslexia and also a dentist. No child or parents or family should ever have to go through what we went through. Getting services for our child took years and years of PPTs, tears, heartache, and unhappiness. It was literally like pulling teeth. Twenty years later, I would like to think that all the ugliness had a purpose. It brought me to where I am today – an advocate for students, families and teachers.

Teachers need a bill that will ensure that when they pay a university to enroll in a program to become a reading specialist, they will get a high quality, evidence -

based comprehensive program that will result in their being able to provide evidence-based services to students. Families whose tax dollars support not only their local school systems, but also our public universities who are responsible for ensuring high quality education programs, deserve a high return on their investment and should expect that teachers can teach their students. Likewise, local school systems should be able to trust that a teacher's advanced certification in reading means something. Students who attend our schools should receive the instruction they need in reading. Of all the areas of education, there is more research about teaching reading than any other subject.

We have an opportunity today to make a difference in the lives of students and their families, the professional lives of teachers, and the future of our educational system in Connecticut. It is an opportunity long overdue.